

COMMENTS ON APPLICATION TO VALIDATE *XIPHIAS PLATYPTERUS* SHAW & NODDER, 1792, FOR THE INDIAN OCEAN SAILFISH.

Z.N.(S.) 1657

(see volume 21, pages 444-446)

By Henning Lemche (Universitetets zoologiske Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark)

The proposals relating to the name *gladius* Bloch (Bull. zool. Nomencl. 21 : 444-446) do not appear easily acceptable to zoologists interested in stability in nomenclature. To me, it seems much the simpler to restrict the name *gladius* Bloch so as to be valid only for the Pacific species.

Is there any reason given by the applicant but not to be deduced from his application, why he does not use his right to serve as a "first reviser" through stating that he selects the specimen in the British Museum as the lectotype. Then, the name *gladius* Bloch becomes unequivocal, and I understand that it is this name that Mr. Whitehead wishes to replace by the forgotten name *platypterus* Shaw & Nodder.

May I suggest, therefore, that the application is returned to Mr. Whitehead with the suggestion that he either withdraws it entirely and uses his right to serve as a first reviser in such a manner as to preserve the name *gladius* Bloch now in use, or supplies the Commission with further information on his reason for not doing so.

REPLY TO COMMENTS BY HENNING LEMCHE

By P. J. P. Whitehead (British Museum (Natural History), London)

Dr. Lemche's objection to resurrection of *Xiphias platypterus* Shaw & Nodder, 1792, for the Indian Ocean sailfish is merely personal preference for the conservation of *Istiophorus gladius* (Bloch); it fails to undermine the reasons given for preferring the former name, and advances as reasons only simplicity and easier acceptability. Revision and type designation are only the means towards effecting Dr. Lemche's preference, not reasons for doing so, and are thus irrelevant to the issue.

The question centres plainly round the concept of "stability". My application gave reason why purely verbal stability (retention of the name *gladius*) should be subordinated in favour of nomenclatorial stability (provision of unassailable basis on which species was first described).

To achieve the former (verbal stability), several rather arbitrary steps must be taken. Much of Bloch's description of *Scomber gladius*, and most of his figure, must be discounted. The fact that a well-known specimen had been described and figured accurately must be passed over in favour of designating it neotype of a species so inaccurately described that specimen and figure are sometimes in flat contradiction. This is perhaps not unexpected since the author of *Scomber gladius* had never examined what would now become the type.

To achieve the latter (nomenclatorial stability), only a single controversial step is required (resurrection of a *nomen oblitum*). The description and type agree, and the name accords with all the provisions of the Code except Article 23(b).

For simplicity, the latter course is quite plainly superior to the former.

For easier acceptability, it can be pointed out that Article 23(b), without which the present application would be unnecessary, has been perhaps more heavily attacked than any other article in the Code (for example by Bradley, 1962, Bull. zool. Nomencl., 19 (6) : 345-346; Smith, 1962, *ibid.*, 19 (6) : 346-348; Holthuis, 1963, *ibid.*, 19 (6) : 348-349; Vockeroth, 1963, *ibid.*, 20 (1) : 79-80; Sabrosky, 1963, *ibid.*, 20 (1) : 79-80).

Name changes caused by systematic procedure (through lumping or splitting) are accepted and assimilated to the extent of their objective (ultimately biological) validity. Verbal convenience is not one of the parameters involved. Name changes caused by nomenclatorial procedure, however, may rest solely on grounds of priority, in which case, all else being equal, convenience, acceptability and the interests of general usage

must be considered. But, in the present case, the choice involves not merely priority, but also comparison between the objective validity of two names *as indications of the species*.

In this sense, there can be little doubt that *Xiphias platypterus* Shaw & Nodder is superior. This fact outweighs any temporary inconvenience caused by a name change. Other name changes may well follow revision of the several nominal Indo-Pacific species of *Istiophorus*, perhaps resulting in the recognition of a single species. That species should be based on an accurate description and type specimen, both of which pertain to *Xiphias platypterus* Shaw & Nodder; neither of which pertain to *Scomber gladius* Bloch.

My application is, therefore, not withdrawn.

FURTHER COMMENTS BY HENNING LEMCHE

Z.N.(S.) 1657

Mr. Whitehead seems to have slightly misunderstood my attitude in the case of *Scomber gladius*, maybe because he may not have realised that I have no personal preference but that as a Commissioner I will have to vote against his application as the reasons for adopting it do not appear sufficiently strong to me.

I have never asked Mr. Whitehead to establish a neotype for *Scomber gladius*, but I have asked for the reasons why Mr. Whitehead has not himself clarified the issue simply by selecting the specimen in the British Museum as the lectotype. Such a procedure would make that name unambiguous, and clarifications of this sort are commonplace in taxonomy.

The introduction in the Rules of the completely new principle advocated by Mr. Whitehead of nomenclatorial (sic!) stability versus a verbal one would probably be most disturbing. It has never been practice to consider the name used in the better description as thereby being the one to be preserved even against general usage.

On the other hand, if the specialists concerned do support Mr. Whitehead's proposal to the exclusion of the one mentioned by me, I would imagine that my attitude would become influenced.

The misinterpretations of Article 23(b) which form the basis of many protests against its application do not need to be discussed here, as they may soon be officially treated in some manner.

REPLY TO HENNING LEMCHE'S COMMENT

By P. J. Whitehead

The three points in Commissioner Henning Lemche's comment can be briefly answered.

1. *Lectotype designation*: the British Museum Banksian sailfish, undoubted holotype of *Xiphias platypterus* Shaw & Nodder, could be designated *neotype*, not *lectotype*. The Code clearly indicates that a *lectotype* be chosen only from syntypal material. The specimen is not one examined by Bloch. *Lectotype* designation might be made under the Plenary Powers, but the designation of this specimen as type of *Scomber gladius* Bloch would be most improper because,

- (a) Bloch's description (text) has been almost universally condemned since Günther (1868, *Cat. Fish. Brit. Mus.*, 2 : 513),
- (b) but authors have accepted Bloch's figure (albeit with misgivings since it shows a "generic hybrid" between the swordfish, *Xiphias gladius* L., and a species of sailfish, *Istiophorus*),
- (c) however, *Scomber gladius* Bloch has been unequivocally restricted to an *Atlantic* species by Whitley (1955, *Austral. Mus. Mag.*, 11 (12) : 382) (on Bloch's figure only—see my reply to Prof. Robin's comment).

Bloch cites but criticises Broussonet's description of the Banksian specimen.